DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 090 655 EA 006 104

AUTHOR Hanna, John R.
TITLE The Project Approach and the School District. Oregon School Study Council Bulletin, Vol. 17, No. 9.
INSTITUTION Oregon School Study Council, Eugene.
PUB DATE May 74
NOTE 22p.
AVAILABLE FROM Oregon School Study Council, College of Education, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403 ($1.25, quantity price available on request)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Guides; Bureaucracy; Curriculum Development; Federal Aid; Job Satisfaction; Leadership Qualities; *Management Education; *Organization; Program Proposals; *Project Applications; Project Training Methods; *School Districts

ABSTRACT

The project approach is suited for dealing with change, and along with the functional organization, has some important things to offer a school district. The project approach is a way to build in some organizational flexibility without completely losing organizational stability. The smaller, less complicated project provides excellent training for less experienced administrators and can give top management much better control than could any type of committee arrangement. The project approach allows the district to better utilize its scarce resources, produces better educational results in a shorter period of time, and can aid the bureaucratic organization in its response to the changing demands of modern society. A selected bibliography is included. (Author/MLF)

ED 090655

OSSC BULLETIN

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Foreword

John Hanna, formerly Director of Planning of Bellevue Schools, Bellevue, Washington, is currently a Research Assistant with the Field Training and Service Bureau, College of Education, University of Oregon.

Mr. Hanna has extensive experience in the use of planning and project management. He has studied project management techniques in both military and industrial settings.

Following an extensive intern experience with a major developmental project of a large aerospace firm, Mr. Hanna developed a planning office and implemented project management techniques in the Bellevue School District. Based on these experiences, Mr. Hanna also designed and developed project management workshops which he has presented to school administrators throughout the Pacific Northwest.

The contents of this Bulletin are based on Mr. Hanna's research efforts, training, and experiences in adapting project management techniques to the administration of public schools. His thoughts deserve careful consideration by all school administrators.

Kenneth A. Erickson
Executive Secretary

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THE PROJECT APPROACH AND THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Introduction

Warren G. Bennis predicts that bureaucracy will founder on its inability to adapt to change precipitated by a technologically sophisticated society. He advises that new organizational patterns have to be developed that can react faster than the present bureaucratic forms.[1]

It is not the purpose of this article to advocate the overthrow of bureaucratic forms of organization. Indeed, they have and will continue to serve us well in many capacities. For despite all the criticisms experienced by bureaucracies, when functioning smoothly, they are efficient, predictable, impartial, and fast.[2] The problem is, bureaucracies do not always function smoothly. Bureaucracies often have difficulty in reacting quickly to change, as Bennis points out.

A bureaucratic organization can be modified so that it can react faster when the need arises. Such a modification is important to those organizations established to provide education. The second half of the twentieth century, thus far, has been filled with one change after another. The demands created by a constantly changing society has seriously taxed the capacity of many of our educational bureaucracies to effectively and efficiently respond.

Alvin Toffler in his book Future Shock introduces the term "ad-hocracy."[3] This term takes on significance when considered in the light of Bennis' prediction. It provides a framework for bureaucracies to react quickly to society's needs.

Ad-hocracy is the antithesis of the permanence so characteristic of bureaucratic organizations. Ad-hocracy, applied to an organization, can become a way of life just as permanence has become so for the many who work in a bureaucracy. Ad-hocracy provides the means through which an organization can adapt itself to the ever-changing demands of a modern society. Project management,

which is starting to become more common in many organizations of today, is ad-hocracy in application.

Before considering what project management itself is, what is a project? Desmond L. Cook of Ohio State University, a leader in project management, gives the following characteristics of a project:

1. A project is usually finite in character.
2. A project is usually complex in nature.
3. A project consists of a series of tasks which relate only to that particular project.
4. A project generally consists of a once-through, non-repetitive, or a one-of-a-kind activity.[4]

David I. Cleland of the University of Pittsburgh said, " . . . the project approach is a management philosophy--a unique blending of organizational forces to manage activities which cut across different organizational lines."[5] Projects are classified as temporary (ad hoc) organizations that the parent organization establishes for the purpose of achieving some end-result within the time, cost, and specifications given. School districts have many activities that are compatible with the "project" approach.

The project approach is complementary to the functional organization. The functional organization is primarily designed to satisfy the organization's need for maintenance. The project approach, on the other hand, is well suited for dealing with change. Together they form a matrix-type organization (see chart 1) that is capable of meeting the demands for both maintenance and change.[6]

Project Characteristics

Projects are structured as horizontal organizations; they are flat when compared to functional organizations; the chain of command is relatively short. Projects usually cut across organizational lines to pick up technical support from the various departments. Projects appear as a need appears, and disappear when the need has been satisfied. They can be large, such as the SST program of Boeing a few years ago, or small, requiring the efforts of just two or three people. The project's organization and operation depend a great deal upon the mission and the available resources.

How does a project spread itself over time? Projects can be considered as following some kind of general life cycle. The project is conceived in the conceptual phase--somebody has an idea for a new reading program. The details of the idea are further developed into a general plan of attack or strategy--the definition phase. A model of the process for achieving the end-result is developed--the planning phase. The product (reading program) is developed and tested--the operational phase. If the product meets the specification, the project will then pass into the implementation phase where the newly developed product is added to or replaces the current program (see chart 2).

Federal projects go through planning, operation, evaluation, and dissemination phases. All projects have a beginning, a middle, and an end that generally corresponds with the phases suggested.

Basic Concepts in the Management of Projects

The basic structure underlying the management of projects includes:

1. Designation of a leader for the project.
2. Centralization of planning and control of the project in one man or a team.
3. Decentralization of support for the project with such support under the direction of the project leader.[7]

Designation of a Project Leader

The designation of a project leader is probably the most crucial decision to be made about the project. Pick the wrong person and failure can be predicted. A project leader can be an administrator, teacher, custodian, bus driver, etc. The important thing is that the best person be picked for the specific project at hand. For example, in a project developing a new reading program, a highly trained classroom teacher might be selected. The person must be given every assistance by the larger organization to achieve the end-result desired. Top management support is essential to the success of the project leader.

Planning and Control Centralization

The project leader is responsible for planning the project from beginning to the end. His career, his job, and his reputation will rest upon his success or lack of success. If a person accepts the obligation to bring a project to a successful conclusion, he must have a great deal of influence in determining what will and what will not be done.

Control, i.e., seeing that things happen according to plan, is important to the project leader. Control is provided for the project leader by insuring that planning, resources allocation, and information management are centralized in the position. It is his ability to control that becomes his source of authority, which in turn aids him in accomplishing his responsibilities. As far as organizational control over the project, the project

leader is accountable to some leader in the parent organization for accomplishment of the project.

Decentralization of Project Support

Decentralization of project support means that the project relies upon support from the functional departments of the organization. If the project is to have a budget, the business department will aid in developing the budget and help the project leader in accounting for the expenditures. This concept is very powerful for several reasons. Through decentralization of project support, the organization, as a whole, has a better opportunity to use its resources. Functional departments have an opportunity to apply their expertise to projects, thus strengthening the project's technical aspects (see chart 1). This avoids the costly practice of attaching full-time personnel to a single project. Servicing of projects by experts located in functional departments allows the project to have a small nucleus of staff and still possess the technical capabilities of a much larger project staff.

The Project Leader

The project leader is the key to successful project management. This person has a direct relationship to the quality of the end-results of the project; therefore, he must be selected carefully.

The basic task of the project leader is to produce a desired end-result. These end-results must be produced in accordance with the following parameters:

1. Project plan
2. Project budget
3. Project schedule
4. Product specifications

These parameters are identified by the project leader and his staff. Agreement is reached between the project leader and his boss regarding the parameters before the project is allowed to proceed. Another way of looking at this process is that a quasi-contract is developed between the project leader and the boss. The "contract" specifies what will be required by the project and what will be accepted as evidence of successful completion of the project.

One common error made when selecting a project leader is to automatically choose someone who has demonstrated his or her abilities in a functional leadership capacity. Although to do so seems reasonable, it many times proves fatal to the project. Several problems arise when this type of "tapping" is followed indiscriminately. First, the project arena is different than running a functional organization. Usually in a project everything is new. This "newness" is an uneasy world for someone who is used to routine. Second, the authority of a project leader is more real and less legal. The project leader has to rely upon his ability to persuade, negotiate, and his strategic position relative to control of planning, resources and information (real authority). This can be an uncomfortable situation for someone who has come to rely upon the authority of rank (legal authority) to get the job accomplished. Third, the relationship with former peers

changes when one assumes the project leader role. The functional leader, when acting as a project leader, is no longer on an equal standing with other functional leaders. Fourth, the problem with using a functional leader to lead a project is that all too often he is given both the functional and the new project job to do without a reduction in his functional responsibilities. In this case, neither job is well done and a good leader is overworked and frustrated.

This does not mean that, in every case, a good functional leader cannot be a good project leader, but one should use some caution in making such a dual assignment.

Why Would a School District Be Interested in the Project Approach?

Probably one of the most obvious reasons for a school district to be interested in the project approach is that it provides for organizational flexibility. The project gives an organization a way to respond to problems without establishing a permanent structure. It provides the organization with a way of regrouping resources to meet different problems.

Projects provide training grounds for prospective managers--a place where they can get experience, and a place where the organization can assess the talent, the knowledge, and the motivation of the individual. It is a place where both parties can look each other over to determine if the relationship should be established on a more permanent basis.

The project approach also gives the organization a flexible way of adding to the rewards of its members. Frederick Herzberg says the "satisfiers" such as recognition, advancement, achievement, work, and responsibility are prime motivational factors.[8] The classroom teacher is not in a position where many of these "satisfiers" are readily provided by the organization. The project increases opportunities to reward on the basis of Herzberg's "satisfiers."

For example, appointing a teacher as project leader for the duration of a project and letting him/her return to the classroom upon completion of the project, provides the best of both worlds for some teachers. The teacher does not have to completely leave teaching (a source of satisfaction for the teacher), but can periodically venture forth to utilize his or her talents in projects, and thus secure "satisfiers" that go along with this administrative kind of work--"satisfiers" such as recognition and responsibility. The educational organization, then, has the service of a teacher and the service of an administrator in one person. And the teacher has

found broader fields for reward in the organization. This movement within the organization can provide opportunities for teachers to benefit from specific "satisfiers":

1. Recognition can be provided through the opportunity to lead or be part of an important project.
2. Advancement can be indicated by the leadership positions made available through projects.
3. Achievement can be made possible through the quality or type of work done on the project.
4. Responsibility can be made available through the leadership or technical positions offered in the project.

Besides those "satisfiers" mentioned above, the project can also be used to extend teachers' contracts into the summer, make pay differentials possible and add some variety to the job assignments.

Another important point about the project approach is that it frequently can include an approval stipulation which gives to a district leader--the superintendent, the principal, the director, etc.--an excellent opportunity to implement some control over the quality of the product being developed. The product and process must be planned and approval granted before a project can go on to the next phase. This approval stipulation can become a prerequisite to continuation of the project at any point along the life cycle continuum. In this case, the approval stipulation provides substantial control opportunities.

How Does One Start Using the Project Approach?

Probably the first thing a person should do when thinking about using the project approach is to consider the various opinions on the subject. Three names surface from literature on project management. Desmond L. Cook is an educator, is practical in his approach and is knowledgeable. David I. Cleland has been in project management since his days in the Air Force. He writes well and is getting experience in education by working with school people in California. Russell Archibald is a pioneer in project management. He's a plain talker and is able to make the transition from business jargon to education without losing too much in the process. His writing is more technical than Cook and Cleland, but interesting and informative. Other writers are available and offer interesting insights into project management, but these three provide substantial material for the novice. (A selected bibliography on project management is given at the end of this article.)

Once a person feels that he has a good grasp of the subject of project management and top management support, then the next thing would be to take a project-type activity and try the project approach. When the test project has been picked, then a project leader should be selected who is capable of producing the desired end-results. This person must be provided with a good staff, the money needed to do the job, and the functional leaders' cooperation. It is important to work slowly and gradually so that the people involved have time to adjust to the new project approach. Good planning, monitoring, and evaluation of both the project's process and the product must be undertaken. If the first project is successful, explore the characteristics that made it a success, see if they can be improved, and move on to the next project.

As discussed in this article, the project approach has some

important things to offer a school district. It is a way to build in some organizational flexibility without completely losing organizational stability. The smaller, less complicated project provides excellent training for less experienced administrators. And it can give top management much better control than any type of committee arrangement could ever do. The project approach allows the district to better utilize its scarce resources. In sum, the project approach produces better educational results in a shorter period of time, and it can aid the bureaucratic organization in its response to the changing demands of our modern society.

Chart 1

Matrix-Type Organization

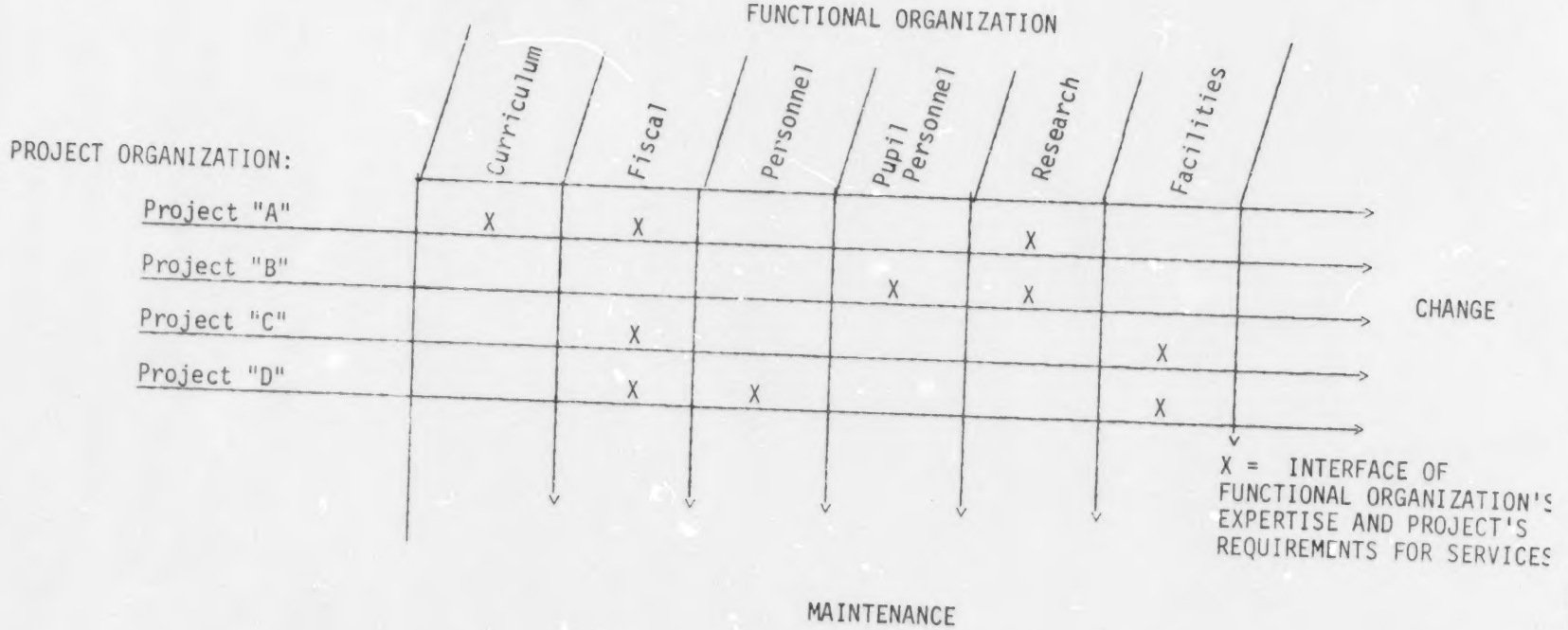
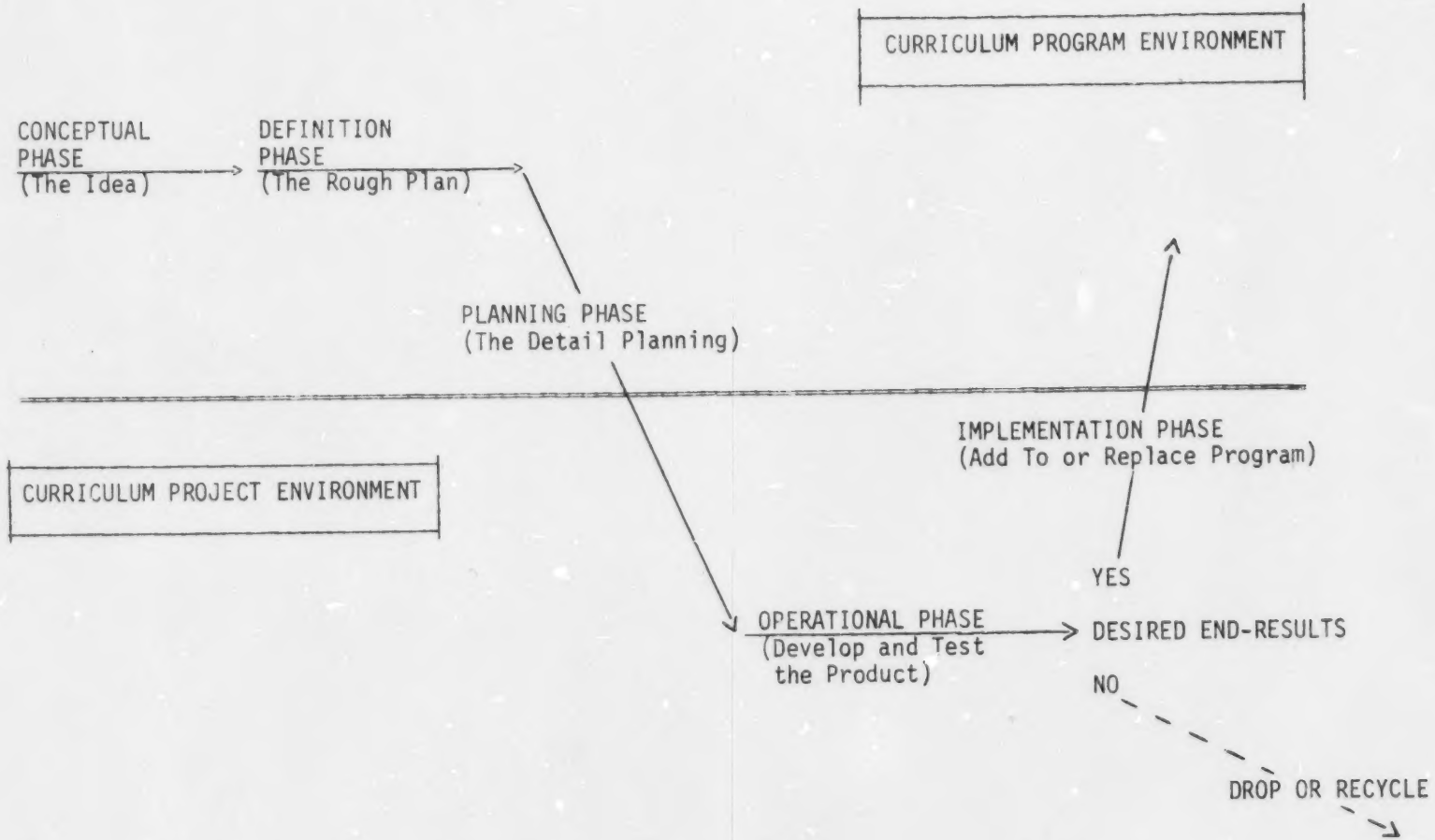


Chart 2

Life Cycle of a Curriculum Project



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[1]Warren G. Bennis, "Beyond Bureaucracy," The Temporary Society, by Warren G. Bennis and Philip E. Slater (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), pp. 53-76.

[2]Robert G. Owens, Organizational Behavior in Schools (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 60.

[3]Alvin Toffler, Future Shock (New York: Random House, Inc., 1970), pp. 124-142.

[4]Desmond L. Cook, Educational Project Management (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Company, 1971), pp. 4-5.

[5]David I. Cleland, "Key Problems for Project Management System Developers" (paper presented to Project Management Institute, Second Annual Seminar, St. Louis, Mo., October 22-24, 1970), p. 3 (Mimeographed).

[6]John F. Mee, "Matrix Organization," Systems, Organizations, Analysis, Management: A Book of Readings, by David I. Cleland and William R. King (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1969), pp. 23-25.

[7]Booz, Allen and Hamilton, Inc., Project Manager's Handbook (New York: Booz, Allen and Hamilton, Inc., 1967), p. 2.

[8]Thomas J. Sergiovanni and Fred D. Carver, The New School Executive: A Theory of Administration (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1973), pp. 70-78.

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